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ABSTRACT

A report is given of a three-phase study of the performance of 554 elementary education majors before and after a recent wave of educational reforms in Mississippi. Data were arranged pre/post Mississippi Education Reform Act (1982), pre/post College of Education reform (1984-88), and post reform data (after 1988). The purpose was to be able to compare a variety of data from 2 years prior to 1984, (before actual changes) with data of those graduating after 1984 (partial legislated change and partial college changes), and with those later students after 1988-89 (those who have had all the changes applied). An analysis of the data suggests that student test score improvement has more to do with higher entrance requirements than educational program reform. Data are presented on tables, and references are appended. (JD)

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A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF PRE AND POST REFORM ACT DATA ON ELEMENTARY EDUCATON MAJORS: THE THIRD YEAR

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A Longitudinal Study Of Pre and Post Reform Act Data On Elementary Majors: The Third Year

Background

In 1984 the authors' college of education underwent a large scale revamping of the undergraduate program. The reorganization, like those at so many other institutions, came on the heels of a variety of reports from private foundations and governmental agencies.

Historically, improvements suggested to the profession have involved tougher standards, lesser standards, "better" teachers, more academics, and more research based curriculum, etc. ("Recent Reports," 1983). The majority of these reports have dealt with the problems arising in secondary education and the training of secondary education teachers. Ergo, what is good for improved secondary education teacher training must also be good for elementary education majors. Cautions are now appearing that what applies to secondary programs does not necessarily apply to elementary programs and that teacher education is turning into a technical/vocational approach (skills teaching to put into place tomorrow). (Stone, 1987).

Critical reports replete with dire prophecies about the public schools have surfaced approximately one per decade since 1883, culminating with the recent 1983-88 period. Nearly all of the reports during this one hundred year period conflict with previous findings. We now appear to be in a period of excellence, interpreted as more hours, more homework, more testing, more of everything. While the subject of poor teaching, a commonality among the reports, is often discussed none touches on the topic of good teaching. ("Scholar Pinpoints Holes," 1984). We are now riding on the crest of the most recent wave of school reform which will subside in roughly seven to ten years if history repeats itself. This reform movement has manifested itself in teacher education and teacher evaluation.

Competency testing no longer implies the testing of skills acquired by the students. It now refers to the evaluation of teaching skills. Despite the current emphasis on competency testing, universities and other institutions should concentrate on preparing effective teachers, not ones who can pass tests (Cooper, 1988). The purpose of education reform has been an attempt to improve quality education of children as well as the teachers who teach them. The task of improving education is handicapped by the fact that no one is able to define "quality." (Fisher, 1984-85). Legislated reform has very little grass roots support and the mandated type reforms handed to education may have even more so depressed the professionalism in education. (Corrigan, 1985; Warren, 1985).

William J. Bennett completed two major reports concerning elementary schools during his tenure as U. S. Secretary of Education. Both were touted as scathing attacks on the dire straits of elementary schools and elementary school teachers and prompted numerous calls for reform, yet, if one reads even the first page of First Lessons: A Report On Elementary Education in America, (1986), Mr. Bennett states "... that American elementary education is not menanced by a rising tide of mediocrity." and, five years later in 1988, in Bennett's advance copy of James Madison Elementary School: A Curriculum For American Students, he points out that elementary school achievement is higher than it has been in three decades. When the President conducted the 1989 Education Summit (Education Summit, 1989) at the University of Virginia, the media reported results that discussed failings of high school students and stagnating college entrance tests. Elementary schools, though, "...are doing better at teaching the basics - such as reading and arithmetic ..." (p. 12A).

Warren (1985) has suggested that the present series of reforms are just another series of fads which will fade into the shadows as another trend occupies the spotlight. Possibly, John Sculley, (1988), President of Apple

Computer, Inc., in his opening statement in "Tools for the Future," sums up the success of past reforms when he writes "our country is bounding headlong into the information age, but you wouldn't know it to look inside most classrooms today. In fact, an 18th century visitor overwhelmed by the new sensations of our modern world would feel remarkably at home in a typical classroom" (p. 10). It would appear that all of our reforms from the turn of the century have really caused very few changes.

So why revamp our elementary teacher education program? Partly because the general perception by the public is that change is synonymous with improvement. Goodlad (1988) refers to this as the "bandwagon" syndrome of education leaders. He writes that when it comes to decisions about how prospective teachers should be trained "even some heads of teacher education programs don't seem to know. In brief, dogma and confusion abound" (p. 108). Frank Smith (1989), adds that evaluation, the panacea of educational improvement, might actually be a factor that contributes to the decrease of literacy and that "evaluation is grossly overrated" (p. 356).

Skepticism is what gave birth to the authors' concern of our own area of elementary teacher education. Goodlad (1988) explains that skepticism is a necessary ingredient when revamping the old. Questions should be provoked concerning the basis for instituting changes, how it will be better, etc. This is the time for gathering data and exploring it thoroughly, making program adjustments, not just embracing mandates. The call of the future is to be able to learn rapidly, be adaptable, flexible, and be knowledgeable in the use of technology. Education is just one of the issues of the 1990's; in planning, educators need to be ready for the energy of new ideas that will come faster by the turn of the century (Manning, 1989).

Data Collection

Baseline data were gathered and organized in a form that provided demographic information and which could eventually be used for short and long term program planning. Our data were arranged pre/post Mississippi Education Reform Act (1982), pre/post College of Education reform (1984-88), and post reform data (after 1988). At the outset of the study our purpose was to be able to compare a variety of data from two years prior to 1984, (Before actual changes) with data of those graduating after 1984 (partial legislated changes and partial college changes), and with those later students after 1988-89 (those who've had all the changes applied).

Phase I Summary

The average elementary education major that graduates from Mississippi State University is female (96.7%), Caucasian (84.3%), and transfers from a junior college (80%). When comparing graduates prior to 1984 (state entrance and college reforms took place at this point), with those who graduated after 1984 there was a significant difference at the .01 level for every ACT sub-area in favor of those "after" graduates. Even though the ACT comparison (at entrance) illustrated great differences; those who graduated after 1984 and who have participated in the College of Education Professional Core reform package have showed a significant change in only the NTE General Knowledge Mean. (Shelton, Turner, & Sumrall, 1987).

Phase II Summary

Presently, our university uses the ACT as part of a general entrance requirement. College of Education students may use the Composite ACT in leiu of the general knowledge portion of the COMP, or use the GK portion of the NTE for the same purpose. At exit from the teaching program one is certified upon successful completion of the NTE. A great deal of time, effort, and expense has been used to take exams which apparently test the same

types of knowledge. A significant relationship between the COMP and the NTE, and the Composite ACT and the NTE exists. From our findings, based on graduates covering approximately six years, we recommended consideration be given to the eliminate of this redundence.

After reviewing Phase I and Phase II data one might be justified in stating that student test score improvement may be tied more to higher entrance requirements than program revision. (Shelton, Turner, & Perkins, 1988).

Present Findings - Phase III

Phase III of this study compared three groups of elementary education graduates. Group I included students from the 1982-1984 period who graduated prior to any reforming of the program. Group II was made up of those students from the 1984-1988 period. During this time the State of Mississippi, the University, and the College of Education implemented a variety of changes. None of the students during this period had a program in which they completed all of the changes. The most recent group, the 1988-1989 graduates are the first ones to have completed all segments of reform.

Data presented in Table I report the demographic information for all graduates since this study began. Tables II and III examine NTE and ACT data comparing the three distinct groups. An analysis of variance was used to determine differences among the means on the NTE and ACT. The Scheffe post hoc test was used to analyze significant results.

Table I

Updated Demographic Profile of
Elementary Majors
1988-89

	N	Age	Sex	Race	Transfer
Age at Graduation	(554)	23.00			
Female	(537)		96.9%		
Male	(14)		2.5%		
Other	(3)		.5%		
White	(480)			86.6%	
Black	(28)			5.1%	
Oriental	(4)			.7%	
Not Reported	(42)			7.6%	
Transfers	(408)			73.6%	
Non-Transfers	(146)			26.4%	

Summary

A review of personal data gathered from all graduates in Elementary Educaton since 1982 indicates that a typical graduate is 23 years old, white, female, and transferred from a junior college.

Table III

Analysis of Variance Using ACT Scores Between Group I (1982-84), Group II (1984-88), and Group III (1988-89)

	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	F Ratio	F Probability
English	Group I	60	16.76	5.22	11.61	.0000*
	Group II	222	19.72	4.23		
	Group III	78	19.64	3.73		
	$p < .05$ Results of Scheffé English: Group II & III > Group I					
Mathematics	Group I	60	13.83	6.01	3.54	.0300*
	Group II	222	16.13	6.02		
	Group III	78	15.91	5.84		
	$p < .05$ Results of Scheffé Mathematics: Group II > Group I					
Social Science	Group I	60	13.38	5.08	10.64	.0000*
	Group II	222	17.13	5.75		
	Group III	78	16.20	5.49		
	$p < .05$ Results of Scheffé Social Science: Group II & III > Group I					
Natural Science	Group I	60	17.51	4.83	4.84	.0084*
	Group II	222	19.52	4.60		
	Group III	78	19.53	4.24		
	$p < .05$ Results of Scheffé Natural Sciences: Group II & III > Group I					
Composite	Group I	60	15.55	4.25	10.24	.0000*
	Group II	222	18.18	4.01		
	Group III	78	17.66	3.78		
	$p < .05$ Results of Scheffé Composite: Group II & III > Group I					

Table II

Analysis of Variance Using NTE Scores Between Group I (1982-84) Group II (1984-88), and Group III (1988-89)

	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	F Ratio	F Probability
Communication	Group I	81	655.16	10.76	1.95	.1428
	Group II	277	658.01	12.32		
	Group III	83	657.83	9.67		
General Knowledge	Group I	81	648.48	11.20	4.02	.0187*
	Group II	277	652.56	11.99		
	Group III	83	651.43	9.37		
Professional Knowledge	Group I	81	638.88	102.86	1.38	.2513
	Group II	277	652.35	57.06		
	Group III	83	640.64	101.79		
Speciality Area (Elementary)	Group I	81	543.33	156.34	1.09	.3365
	Group II	277	573.45	160.54		
	Group III	83	568.31	170.24		

$p < .05$ Results of Scheffé General Knowledge: Group II > Group I

Summary and Discussion

There was an inherent assumption that after various reforms (University general education core, College of Education Professional Core, and State Department of Education Certification changes), that a corresponding increase in college students' achievement would result.

As can be found in Table II the only significant difference in NTE scores was found between Group II and Group I on the General Knowledge portion. It is interesting to note that Group II (partial changes) outscored Group III, those most recent graduates who received the benefit of all reform. The data in Table III illustrates that significant changes have taken place in all ACT areas. Students accepted after 1984, Group II and III, scored significantly higher on the English, social science, natural science, and composite of the ACT while only Group II scored significantly higher than Group I on the ACT mathematics area.

Beginning in 1985 students were required to take either a State mandated COMP exam or the NTE General Knowledge and Communication Skills for entrance into the College of Education. They also had to complete a University 45 hr. general education core with a 2.5 Q.P.A. At this point they began a new four Phase Professional Education Core, and had to meet more stringent State Department Certification requirements. All of these were part of the reforms that Group I never had, Group II partially completed, and Group III, the most recent graduates have totally completed.

After reviewing the data one might be justified in stating that student test score improvement has more to do with higher entrance requirements than educational program reform.

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